

Art Criticism Essay Handout

(What Do You See, What Does it Mean, and What Do You Think?)

Do you remember the first day of our Surrealism unit? We looked at the Salvador Dali painting, "The Persistence of Memory", (the one with the melting watches.) The steps we went through in order to get to know this painting are called:

- 1) Description/Analysis
- 2) Interpretation
- 3) Evaluation

You are being asked to complete a piece of writing about the famous Surrealist painting of which I am giving you a print. You will compose your actual essays as homework, or in art class with me if you finish your sketches or artwork ahead of time. I will be grading you on how thoughtfully and thoroughly you answer my questions and follow my directions. **You must use complete sentences and correct spelling. I will be available to help guide you in fulfilling all requirements as you write your essay.** The essays must be handed in by the last class of this unit.

As you remember, going through these steps **in order** is a very valuable way for you to experience a piece of artwork, consider what it might mean, and then evaluate it. Knowing how to do this can help you become more comfortable when you go to museums or galleries, or anywhere you could see art. You are learning to study artwork closely enough that you can make judgements about it and **SUPPORT THAT JUDGEMENT**. Any time you can support your opinion, you are much better off than if you merely jump in with a comment like, "I like it. It's weird!" without being able to explain what you mean and why.

What I would like you to do is to apply the same step-by-step process of art criticism to the Surrealist painting I give you.

You will write your answers to the questions separately for each category. Before you start, we will go over together the example I provide (attached.)

READY?

Part 1: Description/Analysis

(At least one full paragraph.):

Tell me, what do you see? Objects? What kind of scene is it? What does it look like? Be very descriptive.

Part 2: Interpretation

(At least one full paragraph):

Based on your Description/Analysis above, what do you think this painting might mean? What might the artist have been trying to say? Are there symbols? Is there a kind of mood or feeling to it? Why? Base your answers on Description/Analysis! Use the word *because*, so you will be **supporting** your Interpretation.

Part 3: Evaluation

(At least one full paragraph):

Now, based on your Descriptions/Analyses AND your Interpretations, tell me, do you like this painting? Why or why not? (Here are more example questions just to help you get ideas. You do not need to answer each one. You can answer your own:)

Is it successful? Is it well done? Does it cause you to respond, or feel a certain way? Is it original?